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or American publisher. Taking for his text the moral tales of the good Fra Filippo—a rather slender peg on which to hang so rich a vestment—Mr. Heywood gives us the most living and faithful picture of Renaissance Italian life to be found within the lids of any single volume with which we are acquainted. His book is an admirable conception, admirably carried out. He seems to have chosen Siena for his home, and he is a guest of whom she may well be proud.

One of the most striking things in Siena is the cathedral pavement, with its wonderful pictures in stone. Perhaps they are a splendid mistake; perhaps a pavement where men walk is not a place for pictures; but he who visits Siena in August, when the wooden covering that ordinarily protects and hides them has been removed, can never forget their varied and beautiful designs, gradually changing from the outline drawings of the earlier masters to the chiaroscuro of Beccafumi. Mr. Cust has devoted to the subject prodigious study. He has ransacked every source of information, and tells us everything that is certainly known or probably conjectured. No one who goes to visit Siena in August should be without this book to guide him; but the book itself is dry as dust, and almost unreadable. The cuts, however, give one a very fair idea of the designs, and are worth the price of the volume.

G. B. ROSE.

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THE MAN CHRIST IN LITERATURE.

THE CHRIST OF THE AGES: In Words of Holy Writ. Being the Story of Jesus, Drawn from the Old and New Testaments, and Compiled by Wm. Norman Guthrie. The Western Literary Press, Cincinnati. Cloth, gilt.

There is a temptation to all fluent scholars—and seemingly a resistless one to those of more imaginative and poetic temperament—about the Christ themes of Holy Writ. That they are as dangerous as they are tempting, all experience has taught; for the boundary line between the true and the irreverent is so vague and mistily defined, that the impulsive foot is apt to overstep it, unknowing.

So-called "lives of Christ" infest literature—many of them

musty, mock mediæval, when not ancient; more still crude, undigested, and unworthy. And it is probably simple truth to say that not one of them is satisfying to any. They shock at once the preconceived views and the hypersensitive reverence of clerics; they are dull literature, even when not inartistic grouping of facts familiar to all thoughtful lay readers. M. Renan's is a fair example, being perhaps most widely known by name, and one of the most vulnerable to the assaults of both these classes of objectors. I am not prepared to assert that the fault is always that of the writer, rather than of the reader; but, laid to whose door it may justly be, it cancels in advance the efficacy of these perhaps well-intentioned biographies.

Where literature has failed, art has not succeeded better, in its more restricted field. Brushes of its masters, in all ages since the enactment of the Divine Tragedy, have essayed its depicting, necessarily in detached scenes. These have left us some undying creations in form and color; some masterpieces of composition and human expression, now beyond price from intrinsic worth. Yet, it is doubtful if these have actually illustrated the life of Christ on earth at all more clearly to the student, or to the masses, than have the labored books of varied dates. Taking the later and more familiar efforts, as those of Doré and Tissot, they appear as triumphs of art only. It is scarcely doubtful that the close archæology and marvelous texture of the one, and the vivid and bizarre dash of the other, are met at the very threshold of result by the same difficulties of acceptance that have ever deutilized the books. Even those who have conscientiously believed their models given and their pigments mixed by divine inspiration—as, for instance, our Sewanee mediævalist, Johannes Oertel—have spent lives to make episodes enduring, but have failed to illustrate more than mere spots in the illimitable field. What careful thought and studied diction have failed to reach in receptive minds a picture has failed to teach through the eye alone.

Romance, in its modern aggressive forms, has sometimes essayed this seductive theme, only to find it more dangerous

than have biography and art. Perhaps the only novel of "The Christ" that has so far baffled the critics, and will probably stand the test of time, is Gen. Wallace's "Ben Hur;" and its reason for life may be found in its wonderfully reverent vein—clearly unaffected and sustained—and in the location of the tale amid the very scenes and surroundings familiar to the crudest reader as theater of the drama of all time.

It would seem, then, to be left to poetry to embalm and concrete the difficult theme in acceptable and enduring form. Yet the poet meets the same obstacles to acceptance as the prose writer, with the added difficulty of more limited mode or scope of expression. More often, too, he dares that nebulous "poetical license" which loses him in seemingly flippant treatment of his sacred theme. No language seems to have exempted the poetical treatment of the Christ themes from this danger. Longfellow, who knew most tongues—and was never slow to advantage by the results of any one of them all—could not avoid this pitfall. His picture of the Boy Christ in his "Golden Legend" is infinitely crude and coarse; the scene of the alphabet lesson alone—designed for startling effect, by the paralysis of the chastising arm of the rabbi—running well into pathos and nullifying what effect the better descriptions might possibly have had. Other poems may exist that fill all the demands of this seemingly inexorable theme. If there be such, this writer has not chanced to find them.

It would seem that Mr. Guthrie had recognized this out-setting difficulty, and had determined to meet it at the threshold. The criticism that declared "Ben Hur" to be a "blasphemous book," and the "Golden Legend" not to rise above "puerility," is disarmed by his method in "The Christ of the Ages." The most captious cannot combat his facts, because they are, in each and every case, those of inspiration itself. The most sensitively devout cannot cavil at his statement of the facts, for all of these are from Holy Writ. The only opening to insert its lance point, criticism may find in the statement that this is ingenuity, and not genius. Such

possible objection answers itself in the truism that the most direct method is ever the best one for conveyance of the highest truths. And there can be no possible ascription of irreverence; for the words are not his own, in any single case, but have been the property of the ages since the Advent.

The criticism most liable to come is the denial of the need for another "Life of Christ;" but the strength of this one lies precisely within the truth that this is *not* "another" life, but the same old one, condensed and redirected. It is the grandly simple story of sublime love and sacrifice which the apostles tried to teach, which priests and sages and students have taught ever since, and which most mothers teach the little ones at their knee. It is in this very simplicity of ingenuity that the whole strength of Mr. Guthrie's book lies. He has not composed or written a new poem. He makes no pretense to having originated anything. It is the original, undying poem, retold in its own words. And Norman Guthrie is not its author; he has merely edited "The greatest Book ever written; the Biography of Christ."

But the conception is as unique as the actual method was original and laborious. The man who set himself this great, if tedious, task well knew that Bible-reading, as a task, was perfunctory; that most men read the story of their religion with their eyes alone; and that, when not forgotten, it has left no impression adequate to its value. Realizing this, his intent seems to be to retell the story of the Bible, in a form so condensed and simple as to be read by all, yet so attractive in the glamour of its poetry and its scenery as to hold every reader, and sink into his memory indelibly. And the difficulties besetting such a conception need no words.

Mr. Guthrie conceived the idea of a closet drama, telling the life of Christ upon earth; its acts to be the divisions of his divine mission, and its scenes the most salient and fruitful details of his walk among men. A thorough student of the Scriptures, from education, taste, and habit, he realized that he must look to the prophecies for the basis of his work, the foundation upon which to rear the superstructure of fact drawn from the New Testament. He fully realized, too,

that the scenic effects, so to speak, the glow and color of its telling, to hold the average reader's interest and indurate its truths, must be sought for his drama among the poets of the Old Testament. And with this plan of structure in mind he went to work.

It was literally a labor of love. There was none of the spur of originating in it, none of the glow of composition, not even the satisfaction of seeing the theme grow and expand under his touch. It was done ere he began it; had been written ages before. All his labor was to be extracting, dissection, and replacement. Mechanically, the labor was as tedious as it was mentally trying. And—as this paper shall not stray into a “criticism,” either of the statements of the Bible or of the style of writers of that book—some note of its condensations and versification by Mr. Guthrie may be of more interest. That the plan had long been in his mind, there seems little doubt. When finally decided upon, he went at the task with all that energy and absorption that characterize all he does—in literature, and in other affairs of life.

Of French-Scotch descent, William Norman Guthrie is a combination of the fire of the one nation—its enthusiasm and poetic glow—and the dogged stubbornness of the other. Still in the early thirties, with fine physical development and perfect health, he is capable of severe and continuous strain, and his habit of work spares neither mind nor body. His mental mold is wholly enthusiastic and poetic, and he is ever sanguine that effort must accomplish result. He has the elasticity of a modern Antæus. A graduate of both the academic and theological schools of the University of the South, Mr. Guthrie went early into the ministry—first in Ohio and more recently in California. But earlier still, he gave full play to his inborn bent for literature. As a youthful student, he made repute for strongly original poetry, essays, poems, and debates, in college societies and inter-collegiate contests. Later, he did much critical work, especially of the poets and largely of the French and German, for which his intimate knowledge of those tongues gave him

special fitness. He published two volumes of original verse in early life, and a novel, "Whose by Right," which all bore his character marks, but are not remarkable in any way but that. Later, Mr. Guthrie published "A Vision of New Hel-las," a versed apotheosis of American destiny, that was wholly un-American, yet original and strong, but marred by striving after new versification. His yearning for novelty makes him an experimentalist, a fault—if such it be—which is happily absent from the Christ poem. His latest volume, "The Old Hemlock, and Other Poems," has already been noted in this REVIEW. Beside his Church and other work, Mr. Guthrie has won high commendation as a platform and university lecturer. His series on Shakespeare, at the Universities of the South, of Chicago, of Cincinnati, and elsewhere, are remarkable in their diction and replete with originality. With the latter, not all his hearers agree; for he is nowise constant to accepted dicta in criticism, and is intolerant of dissent from his own views. Indeed, as his mentality has grown, he has proved inconstant to some of his own earlier literary loves; being at one time a most ardent Whitmanite, and at another severe castigator of that poet of the faddists. Recently, he gained the honors of burlesque in the London *Punch*, for declaring in a lecture at the University of Chicago that the advance of the world toward higher and purer thought-models doomed Shakespeare and Homer to relegation to bookshelf dust. But, if these unusual dicta be weaknesses, they nowise reflect themselves on Mr. Guthrie's own work, published or unpublished. And it is a strange fact about this truly remarkable man that his very best work has never gone to press, and that this fact is due almost wholly to that inconstancy already noted. Years ago he completed a novel on wholly new lines; strong throughout, and remarkable in parts for strength of character-painting and novelty of situation. This he refused to alter, though the unanimous verdict of skilled critics declared it, if changed, a sure success. Later still, he wrote a tragedy, "Saul, King of Israel." It needed but slight alteration to make it a great acting play. Refusing the mechan-

ical drudgery, Mr. Guthrie tossed aside both novel and play and went at other things.

To the Christ poem he has ever shown more paternal authorship. It cost, as has been said, infinite labor and patience; yet this man of impatient and impetuous nature and habit never wearied nor flagged under it. The idea wholly rounded, and his plan of work fixed, real work began in 1899. That entire summer this writer spent under the same roof with Mr. Guthrie, at Sewanee. His working methods, and his enthusiastic discussions of his plan, were as interesting as novel to a writer of the everyday school. The poem was a drama, the poet believing that to be the highest form of instructive art. The acts, or episodes, were already settled upon; and, aided by his great familiarity with the Scriptures, he had already prepared what may be called his text-charts. These were huge sheets of cardboard, on which were pasted every reference, either in the Old or New Testament, to the particular act or scene each one was prepared for, not for any idea or thought it might suggest—for all that was already worked out—but merely as a glossary of the words of Holy Writ. Some were single words, some phrases; others, again, whole sentences that might possibly be useful; for the poet was resolved that no single expression—not one word even—should appear in the completed drama which did not also appear in the Bible. Thus prepared—saturated with his theme and surrounded by his homemade Scripture dictionaries—Mr. Guthrie began his great poem.

Sewanee at midsummer, beyond the pale of its academic shade, is not always conducive to deep and religious thought. The bustle and demands of social intercourse are distracting; but this poet wrapped himself away from all things about him, in the texture of his weaving thoughts, and wrote long and well each day. With all his erudition and all his self-reliance, I found him as boyish and buoyant—out of literature—as any youngster of the grammar school.

Devoting many hours of the delightful mornings and afternoons to a gifted wife and two young children, it was his habit to rise at two or three o'clock in the morning, light his



lamp on a secluded upper porch, and do half a day's work before the morning stir of the household began. Once in a while his impetuous nature would flare into wild wrath and objurgation at some trivial interruption, but the marvel was how he could work at all in the unaccustomed surroundings of a summer boarding house.

Doubtless the poet found compensation for many annoyances in renewing the souvenirs of his youth, and in consultation with and the encouragement of some of those who had directed his steps up the difficult paths of higher literature. The gentle and yet positive nature of the priest and scholar, whose name appears in its dedication, was foremost of these; and Dr. Du Bose's statement that "it is surprising how the Scriptures lend themselves to versification" was supplemented by helpful words from as able a critic as Prof. W. P. Trent. So Mr. Guthrie wrought and worried, rose before the birds, ran his mile to Green's View to see sunrise, laughed away interruptions, and tramped to Theologs' Pool for an icy plunge, all those busy months. The poem was completed, in its original draft, by mid-autumn, and he carried it to his Ohio home for revision and polish. These it has assuredly received; but it is probable that no important work in verse has been so little changed from its preconceived plan and form, a fact all the more remarkable when the surroundings of its production are considered. Its parent proved more constant to it than to most of his earlier brain children, or even the stalwart ones that succeeded it. All the three years intervening he has kept it at his side and given it tender and maturing touches. The perfected whole stands as a unique and stately poem, written by inspired hands, and compiled by a labor as intelligent as it was loving.

If Mr. Guthrie has mannerisms, as some of his critics declare; if he be inclined to enforce his own theories and prejudices in his original work, either to its help or hurt—he surely has done neither in this one. It stands forth as he first planned it—as its subtitle declares it—"The Words of Holy Writ." And at those words, Criticism stands dis-

armed at the threshold—save such criticism as essays to mend the inspired story of *The Promise* and *The Advent*.

All left, even for the carper, is discussion of Mr. Guthrie's use of the material selected. He seems to the present writer to have cleared a new field and to have worked it well. His deft juxtaposition of the prophecies to the finished result—the promise to the fulfillment—is remarkable for simplicity of method. The continuity of action—holding the reader as a romantic poem might—is equally masterly; strangely so, when the restrictions in verbiage are recalled. Remembering that the words—from cover to cover, with no smallest particle excepted—are from the Bible, one must marvel at the naturalness with which the grandest scenes of the drama of all time, depicted in the *New Book*, get their picturesque stage and their vivid color from the lush luxuriance of wording in the poets of the *Old Book*.

Even did space serve, the story needs no retelling. It is, or should be, familiar to all. The episodes selected for the "acts" are seven: (1) *The Incarnation*, (2) *The Temptation*, (3) *The Transfiguration*, (4) *The Messianic Entrance*, (5) *The Passover*, (6) *The Passion*, (7) *The Risen Christ*. These are embraced in a preface ("Foreword") and an epilogue ("A Vision of Last Things").

The movement of the great story is natural and faithful; the sequence of the scenes, dramatic and cumulative; the prosody exact; and there is no yielding to the temptation everywhere offered, to overload the simplicity of the recital with too much of picturesque color. Naturally, the most impressive passages are found in "*The Passion*." The most effective, in the dramatic sense, are in "*The Messianic Entrance*." The grouping of the parables is masterly, the scourging of the money-changers from the temple revealing the power of those inspired lashes as in a flood of new light. The rhythm moves as liltfully along as though there were no restraint from all the modern dictionaries, so well do "the Scriptures lend themselves" to this sort of verse.

T. C. DE LEON.